

(19)



Europäisches Patentamt

European Patent Office

Office européen des brevets



(11)

EP 0 576 967 B1

(12)

EUROPEAN PATENT SPECIFICATION

(45) Date of publication and mention
of the grant of the patent:
10.09.1997 Bulletin 1997/37

(51) Int. Cl.⁶: **B01L 3/02**

(21) Application number: **93109949.3**

(22) Date of filing: **22.06.1993**

(54) Motor-driven pipette

Motorisch angetriebene Pipette

Pipette motorisée

(84) Designated Contracting States:
AT BE CH DE DK ES FR GB GR IT LI LU NL SE

(30) Priority: **24.06.1992 FI 922939**

(43) Date of publication of application:
05.01.1994 Bulletin 1994/01

(73) Proprietor: **LABSYSTEMS OY CORPORATION**
SF-00881 Helsinki (FI)

(72) Inventors:
• **Tuunanen, Jukka**
SF-00630 Helsinki (FI)
• **Tellmaa, Juha**
SF-01360 Vantaa (FI)

• **Keipl, Antti**
SF-01300 Vantaa (FI)
• **Kukkonen, Ari**
SF-Vantaa (FI)

(74) Representative: **Hertel, Werner, Dipl.-Phys.**
Müller-Boré & Partner
Patentanwälte
Grafinger Strasse 2
81671 München (DE)

(56) References cited:
WO-A-87/00085 **WO-A-91/16974**
US-A- 3 810 391 **US-A- 4 821 586**
US-A- 4 988 481

Note: Within nine months from the publication of the mention of the grant of the European patent, any person may give notice to the European Patent Office of opposition to the European patent granted. Notice of opposition shall be filed in a written reasoned statement. It shall not be deemed to have been filed until the opposition fee has been paid. (Art. 99(1) European Patent Convention).

EP 0 576 967 B1

Description

The invention relates to pipettes according to the preamble of Claim 1

Prior art

In laboratories, pipettes are used for dosing liquids, which pipettes have a cylinder and therein a piston by means of which the liquid is sucked and discharged. The rod of the piston rod extends above the handle of the pipette into a knob, by means of which the piston is moved.

For example the patent publication FI-A-47461 (corresponds to the publication US-A-3810391) describes a pipette of the above-mentioned type. Therein, the piston rod is also connected with a spring, which returns the rod (and thereby also the piston) to its upper position, unless the knob is pressed.

Pipettes in which the piston is moved by the power of an electric motor are also known. This naturally makes the use of the pipette lighter.

Electrically operated pipettes are known e.g. from the publications FI-A-55007 (corresponds e.g. to the publication US-A-4058370), DE-A-3136777, WO-A-87/00085, US-A-4519258, US-A-4905526 and FI-A-902267.

In known electrically operated pipettes, the operation of the motor and thereby also the piston movement are controlled by means of two-position switches.

The US-A-4 821 586 discloses a pipette with the features of the preamble of Claim 1.

General description of invention

It has now been invented an electrically operated pipette, with the features of Claim 1.

It has been observed that the invented solution has an advantage over conventional electrically operated pipettes such that the number of malfunctions and unnecessary safety precautions decreases. This is quite apparently due to the fact that the user has a better motory feel with the pipette operation.

The invention and its certain applications are defined in detail in the patent claims.

Detailed description of invention

In the drawings of the description:

Fig. 1 and 2 show a pipette from the front and from the side;

Fig. 3 and 4 show knob-displacement measuring arrangements utilizable in the pipette;

Fig. 5 shows an alternative positioning of the knob;

Fig. 6, 7 and 8 show different steps of the use of the

pipette; and

Fig. 9 shows the circuit diagram of the pipette.

5 The main parts of the pipette include a body provided with an upper end and a lower end, a cylinder part at the lower end of the body, a piston reciprocating in the cylinder part for sucking and removing liquid, an electric motor and a transmission mechanism for moving the piston, a control system for controlling the piston movement, and a knob slidably and reciprocally movable in the body, the displacement of which knob by means of the control system determines the piston movement.

10 The electric motor can be e.g. a stepping or DC motor.

The transmission mechanism can be based e.g. on a guide screw and nut or on a rack and pinion.

20 The knob has two extreme positions, between which it may be slid. The control is preferably arranged such that the knob has an upper position extending from the body and a lower position located more inside relative to the body, which positions also correspond to the upper and lower position of the piston. Most preferably, the knob is also connected with a return spring mechanism, which tends to keep the knob in its upper position. The knob is then basically of the same type as that used in pipettes operated manually, and its operating mechanism continually gives the user a concrete feeling of the pipetting.

30 Since the knob is not mechanically in a transmission relationship with the piston, the knob can be easily positioned in any place on the body, e.g. on the side of the body. The possibilities of the construction are thus increased. The knob may thus be moved by the forefinger in the cross-direction of the body. Most preferably, the piston has still beneath the lower position a discharge position, into which the piston is driven, when the liquid is dosed out of the pipette. This ensures a discharge of the liquid as completely as possible. Similarly, the knob has a discharge position beneath the lower position.

40 The knob is most preferably connected with a return spring for the discharge movement, which withstands the pressing of the knob below the lower position. In this way, the user may readily feel, when the knob enters into the lower position.

45 The displacement of the knob is most preferably measured by a pulse sensor sensing the direction of movement, by a resistance sensor or an optic sensor. A capacitive or an inductive sensor can also be used. The information about the displacement is transmitted into the control system, which controls the piston movement in a desired manner.

50 The movement limits of the piston can be determined by means of movement limiters, such as stops, limit switches or braking devices, placed on the body or the transmission mechanism. The limiter in volume-controllable pipettes is adjustable, whereby the volume to be pipetted may be set as desired.

The pipette has most preferably a piston-movement monitoring system connected to the control system. The system can be based on e.g. a pulse encoder or a tachogenerator. The monitoring system enters into the control system an information about the distance travelled by the piston. On the basis of this information, the piston movement can be stopped precisely, when the piston is in the desired location. The piston movement is best stopped by decelerating the rotational speed of the motor. By means of the system, also the movement speed of the piston can be followed, if desired. Also the momentary speed of the piston and the difference between the displacement of the knob and the piston can be used as controlled variables in the control system.

The information of the control system about the piston movement can be registered as a function of time, whereby an information about the momentary speed of the piston is obtained. As control parameters can be used a ratio control, in which the displacement of the knob is compared with the distance travelled by the piston, and a derivational control, in which speed differences between the knob and the piston are compared. When the user of the pipette can also control the movement speed of the piston by means of the knob movement, he can also use different speeds for different liquids and different amounts of liquid.

In the best mode, the pipette a further has a volume control mechanism, whereby also the volume set is taken as a controlled variable.

Most preferably, the pipette also includes an exchangeable cylinder-piston module for different volume ranges. In this case, also the volume range can be used as a controlled variable.

A pipette according to Fig. 1 and 2 has a body 1 and at its lower end a cylinder part 2. At the upper end of the body there is a press knob 3. The upper part of the body forms a handle to be grasped with a palm grip.

An exchangeable liquid jet container 4 is fixed to the lower end of the cylinder part 2.

On the cylinder part 2 there is a slidable loosening sleeve 5 and as an extension of its upper end a spring-loaded loosening arm 6 sliding on the side of the body 1 (Fig. 2). This jet-container removal system in principle corresponds to that described e.g. in the publication FI-A-57540 (corresponds e.g. to the publication US-A-4151750).

Outside the pipette body there is also a display 7, which indicates e.g. the volume set, and switches 8 by means of which e.g. the volume can be set.

The cylinder part 2 has a piston 9 reciprocating in the cylinder (Fig. 2). Its rotational movement relative to the cylinder is prevented by means of guides 10.

The piston 9 is moved by means of an electric motor 11. The motion of the motor is transmitted by means of a transmission mechanism formed from a coupling 12 and a gear-wheel system to a journalled guide screw 14. The coupling has a spring, which presses the gear wheel against an end flange of the

shaft. In this way, the coupling slides at a certain boundary moment. At the upper end of the piston there is provided a guide nut 15 corresponding to the guide screw, and a space inside the piston such that the piston can move over the guide screw. When the guide screw is rotated, the piston thus moves either upwardly or downwardly depending on the rotational direction.

For example, an accumulator 16 acts as the power source for the motor.

The movement of the piston 9 is followed by a system 17, which has a rotating encoder disk 18 connected to the transmission system and a pair of sensors 19 counting its lines. By means of the system, it is possible to indicate both the location and the speed of the piston.

The press knob 3 is fitted to be slidable in a longitudinal slot 20 of the body 1. The knob is connected with a primary spring 21, which presses the knob into an upper position. The knob is further connected with a secondary spring 22, which presses the knob upwards after the knob is pressed beneath the lower position.

The knob is further connected with a primary coupling 23 and a secondary coupling 24 (Fig. 6-8), by means of which the functional step of the knob is identified.

The displacement of the knob 3 is followed by means of a measurement system 25. Fig. 3 and 4 show as examples different measurement methods.

The system of Fig. 3 is based on a pulse sensor. It includes on the arm of the knob 3 encoder lines 26 and on the walls of the slot 20 fixed encoder lines 27. The lines 26 and 27 are read by means of an optic sensor 28.

The system 25.2 of Fig. 4 is based on a resistance sensor. It includes a fixed resistor 29 fixed to the slot 20 and a fork 30 sliding on a resistor fixed to the arm of the knob 3. The resistance measured by the system is comparable to the piston displacement. Such a system is more advantageous from the point of view of the current consumption than systems based on optic sensors. When so desired, a system based on an optic-analog sensor can also be used.

In the arrangement of Fig. 1 and 2, the knob is positioned as an extension for the upper end of the body 1, to be used by the thumb in a similar manner than that utilized in pipettes operating by manual force. However, it may be ergonomically more preferable to use the solution of Fig. 5, wherein the knob 3.1 is positioned as projecting horizontally from the body 1 and as being used by the forefinger. Fig. 5 shows a multichannel pipette comprising eight cylinders. Otherwise the system corresponds to that of Fig. 1 and 2.

Both the piston-movement monitoring system 17 and the press-knob-displacement measuring system 25 are connected to an electronic control system 33 (Fig. 2).

The cylinder section 2 with its piston 9 may form a removable module. In this case, by changing the cylinder diameter, pipettes operating in different volume ranges can be obtained. The cylinder section has a

code 34 indicating the volume range, e.g. a code formed from bulges or slots, and in the body a code reader 35, e.g. a reader formed from switches, connected correspondingly to the control system 33.

The code reader 35 can be based on the measurement of e.g. inductance, capacitance or resistance, too.

The operation of the pipette is illustrated by means of Fig. 6-8. At the start of the pipetting (Fig. 1), the press knob 3 is in the upper position and the piston 9 in the upper position corresponding to the last pipetted volume. When necessary, the volume is reset, and the knob is pressed into the lower position against the force of the primary spring 21. As the knob starts descending, the measurement system 25 gives an information to the control system, by means of whose control the piston is driven to the lower position (Fig. 2). The jet container 4 of the pipette is now brought into the liquid and the knob is released into the upper position. The measurement system provides an information about the upward transfer of knob to the control system, and the piston is driven to an upper position corresponding to the set volume (Fig. 1). In this way, the desired volume of liquid is sucked into the container. When the liquid is dosed out, the knob is pressed past the lower position against the force of the secondary spring 22 into an discharge position. When the piston passes the lower position, the measurement system provides an information thereof to the control system, which correspondingly performs the driving of the piston into the discharge position. When the knob is released, the piston correspondingly returns into the upper position.

The pipette can be used in a stepping mode, too, whereby a sucked-in amount of liquid is dosed out as smaller doses. In this case, one pressing of the knob to the lower position moves the piston one step downwards.

The circuit diagram of the control system is shown in Fig. 9.

The programmed controller circuit D1 performs all the operations related to the interface (display 7, keyboard 8, code keys 35) of the pipette, to the runs of the motor 11 (pipetting, stepping) and to the charging of the accumulators 16.

The programs of the interface follow the commands to be given from the keyboard 8 and transmit the program execution according to them. In the running of the motor 11 is followed signals coming from the encoder 18, 19, from which signals the displacement of the piston is calculated. The volume to be dosed in the pipetting mode is comparative with the position of the operating switch. The dosing of the volume selected in the stepping operation is started up by means of a primary movement of the operating switch. The loading operation starts up, when a switching of the loading voltage is observed in the inlet of the controller D1.

The display LCD-1 and the keyboard S1...S4 are directly connected to the corresponding controllers of the controller circuit D1. For the operation of the motor is arranged a separate bridge comprised of channel

transistors V1...V4, which bridge is controlled by the controller. As auxiliary functions related to the controller are a buzzer H1 activated by malfunctions and an indication of the operative voltage.

There is also an inertia switch 36 connected to the controller D1. This reacts to the movement of the pipette and activates the controller. Correspondingly, the controller is deactivated when the pipette has stayed unmoved e.g. for five minutes. This system acts as an automatic power on/off switch. It helps to save the batteries and also facilitates the use of the pipette.

Claims

1. A pipette, which has a body and therein a lower end and an upper end, a cylinder open from below at the lower end of the body, therein a piston (9) movable between the lower and upper position for sucking liquid into the pipette and for removing it therefrom, a motor and a transmission mechanism (12, 13) related thereto for moving the piston, a stopping system for stopping the piston movement into a desired position, a piston-movement monitoring system (17), and an electronic control system (33) for controlling the movement of the piston, which on the basis of the information provided by the monitoring system gives a command to the stopping system to stop the piston movement, characterized in that the pipette comprises
 - a knob (3) reciprocally slidably movable in the body; between a lower position and an upper position wherein the lower and upper position of the knob correspond to the lower and upper position of the piston and
 - a knob-displacement measuring system (25) connected to the control system such that the knob displacement controls the piston movement by means of the control system.
2. A pipette according to Claim 1, characterized in that it comprises a stopping system, which before the stopping of the piston movement decelerates its movement speed by means of the motor.
3. A pipette according to Claim 2, characterized in that it comprises a stopping system, which decelerates the piston speed to zero.
4. A pipette according to any of the Claims 1-3, characterized in that it comprises a piston (9), one of whose positions, preferably the upper position, is adjustable.
5. A pipette according to any of the Claims 1-4, characterized in that it comprises a cylinder part (2) which is exchangeable.

6. A pipette according to any of the Claims 1-5, characterized in that it comprises a spring mechanism (21) for pressing the knob into the upper position.
7. A pipette according to any of the Claims 1-6, characterized in that it comprises a piston (9) which can be additionally moved beneath the lower position into an discharge position, and a knob (3), which can be correspondingly moved into an discharge position beneath the lower position, and that it preferably comprises also a spring mechanism (22), which withstands the transfer of the knob past the lower position towards the discharge position.
8. A pipette according to any of the Claims 1-7, in which the body has a handle to be grasped by the palm, characterized in that the knob (3) can be transferred towards the body and away therefrom, preferably sideways to the body and sideways away therefrom.
9. A pipette according to any of Claims 1-8, characterized in that the control system is connected to a sensor (36) and that the control system is automatically activated by a signal provided by the sensor.
10. A method for controlling the movement of a piston in a pipette according to Claim 1, characterized in that the piston movement is controlled by means of a knob reciprocally slidably movable in the body such that the displacement of the knob controls the piston movement by means of a control system.

Patentansprüche

1. Pipette, welche aufweist einen Körper und darin ein unteres Ende und ein oberes Ende, einen Zylinder, welcher von unten offen ist an dem unteren Ende des Körpers, darin einen Kolben (9), bewegbar zwischen der unteren und der oberen Position zum Aufsaugen von Flüssigkeit hinein in die Pipette und um sie daraus zu entfernen, einen Motor und einen Getriebemechanismus (12, 13), damit in Verbindung stehend zum Bewegen des Kolbens, ein Stoppsystem zum Stoppen der Kolbenbewegung in einer gewünschten Position, ein Kolbenbewegungsaufzeichnungssystem (17), und ein elektronisches Steuersystem (33) zum Steuern der Bewegung des Kolbens, welches auf der Basis der Information, welche bereitgestellt ist durch das Aufzeichnungssystem, einen Befehl für das Stoppsystem gibt, um die Kolbenbewegung zu stoppen, **dadurch gekennzeichnet**, daß die Pipette umfaßt
 - einen Knopf (3), welcher gleitfähig hin- und herbewegbar in dem Körper angeordnet ist; zwischen einer unteren Position und einer oberen Position, wobei die untere und die obere Position des Knopfes der unteren und oberen

Position des Kolbens entspricht, und

- ein Knopfversetzungsmeßsystem (25), welches mit dem Steuersystem derart verbunden ist, daß die Knopfversetzung die Kolbenbewegung mittels des Steuersystemes steuert.

2. Pipette nach Anspruch 1, **dadurch gekennzeichnet**, daß sie ein Stoppsystem umfaßt, welches vor dem Stoppen der Kolbenbewegung die Bewegungsgeschwindigkeit mittels des Motors verzögert.
3. Pipette nach Anspruch 2, **dadurch gekennzeichnet**, daß sie ein Stoppsystem umfaßt, welches die Kolbengeschwindigkeit auf Null verzögert.
4. Pipette nach einem der Ansprüche 1 bis 3, **dadurch gekennzeichnet**, daß sie einen Kolben (9) umfaßt, wovon eine Position, bevorzugt die obere Position, einstellbar ist.
5. Pipette nach einem der Ansprüche 1 bis 4, **dadurch gekennzeichnet**, daß sie einen Zylinder (2) umfaßt, welcher austauschbar ist.
6. Pipette nach einem der Ansprüche 1 bis 5, **dadurch gekennzeichnet**, daß sie einen Federmechanismus (21) umfaßt, um den Knopf in die obere Position zu drücken.
7. Pipette nach einem der Ansprüche 1 bis 6, **dadurch gekennzeichnet**, daß sie einen Kolben (9) umfaßt, welcher zusätzlich bewegt werden kann unter die untere Position hinein in eine Ausstoßposition, sowie einen Knopf (3), welcher entsprechend bewegt werden kann in eine Ausstoßposition unter der unteren Position, und daß sie bevorzugt des weiteren einen Federmechanismus (22) umfaßt, welcher der Übertragung des Knopfes über die untere Position hinaus hin zu der Ausstoßposition widersteht.
8. Pipette nach einem der Ansprüche 1 bis 7, bei welcher der Körper einen Griff aufweist, welcher durch die Handfläche zu ergreifen ist, **dadurch gekennzeichnet**, daß der Knopf (3) übertragen bzw. bewegt werden kann hin zu dem Körper und weg davon, bevorzugt seitwärtig zu dem Körper und seitwärtig weg davon.
9. Pipette nach einem der Ansprüche 1 bis 8, **dadurch gekennzeichnet**, daß das Steuersystem mit einem Sensor (36) verbunden ist, und daß das Steuersystem automatisch aktiviert wird durch ein Signal, welches durch den Sensor bereitgestellt wird.

10. Verfahren zum Steuern der Bewegung eines Kolbens in einer Pipette nach Anspruch 1, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß die Kolbenbewegung gesteuert wird mittels eines Knopfes, welcher gleitfähig hin- und herbewegbar ist in dem Körper, so daß die Versetzung des Knopfes die Kolbenbewegung mittels eines Steuersystemes steuert.

Revendications

1. Pipette, qui comprend un corps et, dans celui-ci, une extrémité inférieure et une extrémité supérieure, un cylindre ouvert par le dessous à l'extrémité inférieure du corps, dans celui-ci un piston (9) mobile entre des positions inférieure et supérieure pour aspirer un liquide dans la pipette ou l'enlever, un moteur et un mécanisme de transmission (12, 13) qui lui est relié pour déplacer le piston, un système d'arrêt pour stopper le déplacement du piston dans une position souhaitée, un système de contrôle (17) du déplacement du piston, et un système de commande électronique (33), destiné à commander le déplacement du piston, qui envoie au système d'arrêt, en fonction de l'information fournie par le système de contrôle, un ordre d'arrêter le déplacement du piston, caractérisée en ce que la pipette comprend :
 - un bouton (3) mobile à coulissement en va-et-vient dans le corps, entre une position inférieure et une position supérieure, les positions inférieure et supérieure du bouton correspondant aux positions inférieure et supérieure du piston, et
 - un système (25) de mesure du déplacement du bouton, connecté au système de commande de façon que le déplacement du bouton commande le déplacement du piston au moyen du système de commande.
2. Pipette selon la revendication 1, caractérisée en ce qu'elle comprend un système d'arrêt qui diminue la vitesse de déplacement du piston, avant son arrêt, au moyen du moteur.
3. Pipette selon la revendication 2, caractérisée en ce qu'elle comprend un système d'arrêt qui diminue à zéro la vitesse du piston.
4. Pipette selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 à 3, caractérisée en ce qu'elle comprend un piston (9) dont l'une des positions, de préférence la position supérieure, est réglable.
5. Pipette selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 à 4, caractérisée en ce qu'elle comprend une partie cylindrique (2) qui est interchangeable.
6. Pipette selon l'une quelconque des revendications

1 à 5, caractérisée en ce qu'elle comprend un mécanisme élastique (21) pour solliciter le bouton vers sa position supérieure.

7. Pipette selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 à 6, caractérisée en ce qu'elle comprend un piston (9) qui peut de plus être déplacé au-dessous de sa position inférieure vers une position de décharge, et un bouton (3) qui peut être déplacé de façon correspondante vers une position de décharge au-dessous de sa position inférieure, et en ce qu'elle comprend de préférence aussi un mécanisme élastique (22) qui résiste à un transfert du bouton au delà de la position inférieure vers la position de décharge.
8. Pipette selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 à 7, dans laquelle le corps comporte une poignée à saisir par la paume de la main, caractérisée en ce que le bouton (3) peut être transféré vers le corps ou en être éloigné, de préférence latéralement pour le rapprocher du corps, et latéralement pour l'en éloigner.
9. Pipette selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 à 8, caractérisée en ce que le système de commande est connecté à un détecteur (36), et que le système de commande est automatiquement activé par un signal envoyé par ledit détecteur.
10. Procédé de commande du déplacement d'un piston dans une pipette selon la revendication 1, caractérisé en ce que le déplacement du piston est commandé au moyen d'un bouton, mobile à coulissement en va-et-vient dans le corps, de telle façon que le déplacement du bouton commande le déplacement du piston au moyen d'un système de commande.

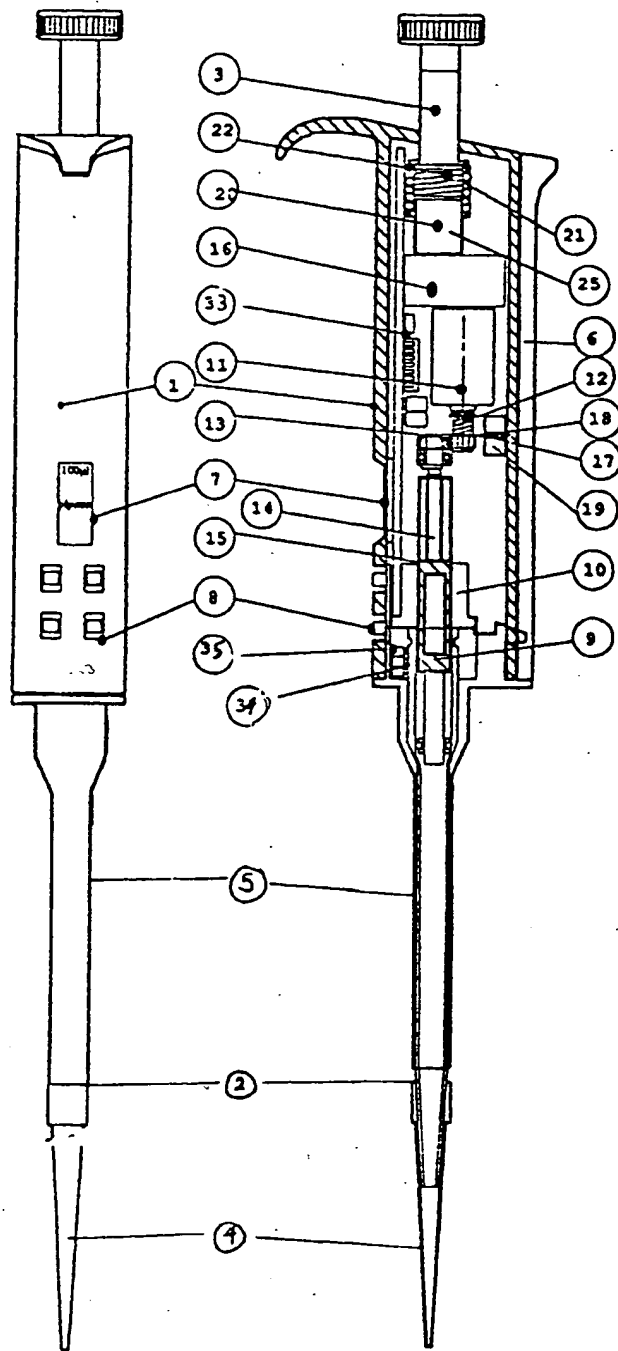


Fig. 1

Fig. 2

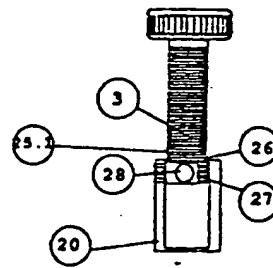


Fig. 3

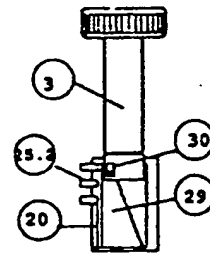


Fig. 4

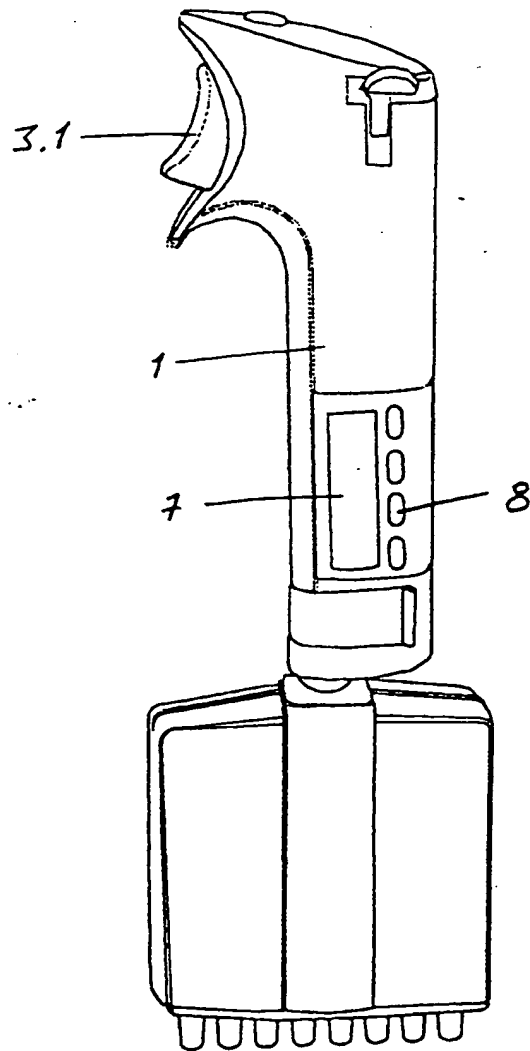


Fig. 5

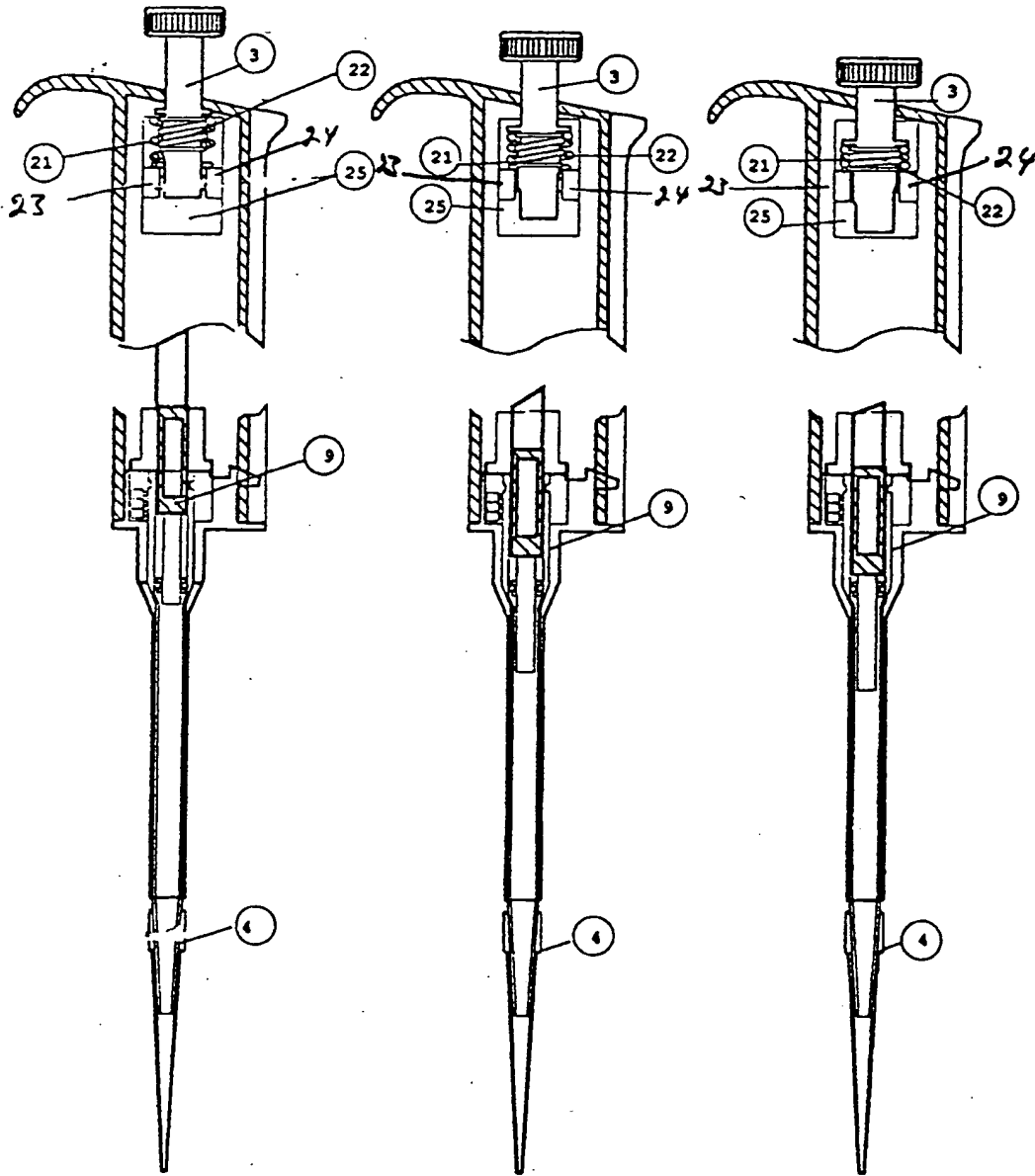


Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

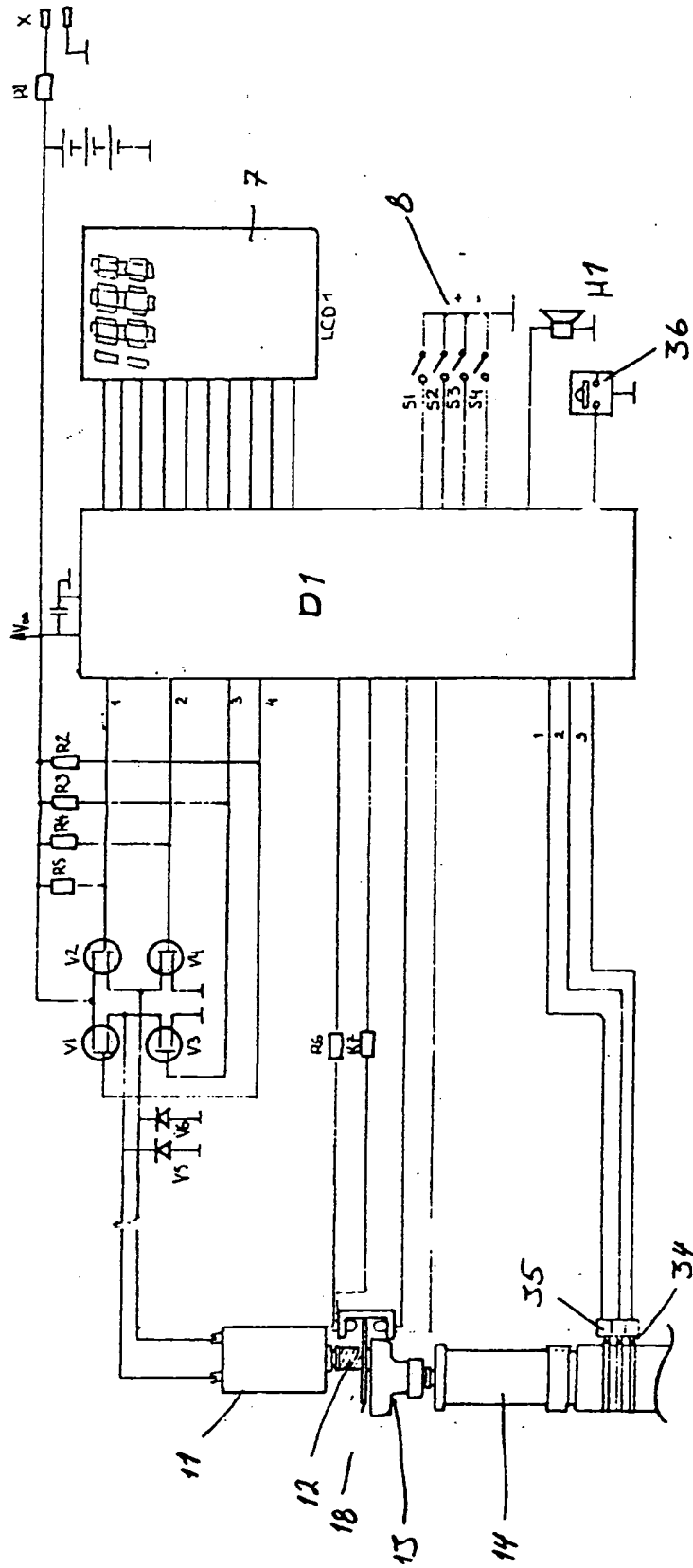


Fig. 9